

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs of each city for park land and recreation facilities and programs are unique and the means of meeting those needs vary widely. San Antonio, like most metropolitan areas, has several public entities that provide facilities and programs. Each metropolitan area, however, is unique in the level of facilities and programs offered by its various providers. This factor complicates comparisons with other park systems in Texas and the United States.

Because San Antonio residents comprise 83% of Bexar County's population, it is not surprising that the City is looked to as the primary provider of park and recreation facilities and programs in this area. However, because of the extensive, more populous metropolitan area surrounding San Antonio, other governmental and private sector entities also play an important role in meeting the citizen's park and recreation needs. As the population continues to grow, cooperation with non-City providers will become increasingly important.

## NEED FOR FACILITIES

One means of addressing need is to use the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) recommended service goal of 10 acres of park land per 1,000 population. For this plan, calculations of City of San Antonio park land per 1,000 residents have been made based on the City's estimated 1997, 2002, and 2007 populations and December 1997 park acreage total.<sup>1</sup> Another set of calculations takes into consideration other public park lands, and a third calculation includes three metropolitan-based parks-- Braunig Lake, Calaveras Lake, and Government Canyon State Natural Area. These ratios are based on the number of park acres in December 1997, and project no additional land acquisition. The ratios are stated to demonstrate the growth in acreage-based need as the population increases.

	1997 Inventory	Current Service Ratio	1997 est. pop 1,115,600		2002 est. pop 1,218,000		2007 est. pop 1,324,000	
			Need	Exc./Def*	Need	Exc/Def	Need	Exc./Def.
City of S.A. acres*	7,461	6.69:1,000	11,156	<3,695>	12,180	<4,719>	13,240	<5,779>
All public recreation acres except lakes and Govt. Canyon	8,786	7.88:1,000	11,156	<2,370>	12,180	<3,394>	13,240	<4,454>
All public park acres including lakes and Govt. Canyon**	14,519	13.01:1,000	11,156	3,363	2,180	2,339	13,240	1,279

\* exc./def. denotes excess or deficit of acres as compared with service goal of 10 acres per 1,000 population

\*\* Only the 683 acres of Government Canyon that will be generally accessible to the public are included in this calculation.

The same calculations were made for each planning subarea and are included in subsequent subarea chapters.

<sup>1</sup> Population estimates and projections were developed by the Planning Department based on historical trends since 1960.

While facilities such as Braunig and Calaveras Lakes and Government Canyon State Natural Area provide City residents with a large surplus of park land, they are inaccessible for many residents and serve specialized needs such as boating, fishing, hiking, and horseback riding. **Careful attention must therefore be paid to serving the majority of residents by providing quality neighborhood and community parks, sports complexes, greenways, and recreation programs that address more urgent urban needs.**

Still, it is important that the City of San Antonio continue to assure that other large recreation facilities in the metropolitan area like Braunig and Calaveras Lakes and Government Canyon be made available. **Though the City of San Antonio in the future will develop facilities to serve both local, urban and more general metropolitan needs, it will increasingly rely on cooperation with other public and private interests. The need for collaboration with other entities is dictated by shared needs and limited financial and physical resources.**

One clear example of the need and opportunity for collaboration is the identification, evaluation and preservation of open space resources in the City and region. Open spaces are important in their ability to accomplish varied objectives. For example, **floodplains such as Leon and Salado Creeks and the San Antonio River have tremendous potential to be developed as multi-purpose linear greenways, literally reaching into every sector of the community.** They can be used not only to improve drainage and protect health, safety and welfare, but to provide additional parks, hike/bike trails, and increased recreational opportunities and to protect natural plant communities and wildlife habitat. Planned in this way, floodplains can improve overall community aesthetics, link neighborhoods and public facilities, provide for multiple public uses, and assist with the cleaning of our air and water.

This approach to integrating drainage with open space development will require close cooperation between City departments, other public agencies, and private organizations and land owners. If successful, San Antonio will be a safer, more attractive, and liveable community.

When assessing the current ability of San Antonio's parks and recreation system to serve the community's needs, it is useful, though not fully conclusive, to compare the City's existing park acres per 1,000 residents to similar ratios for other cities. It is important to remember that while other cities may have more park acres area-wide, it is the type of park land (i.e. neighborhood parks, greenways, etc.) and geographic distribution that helps to determine if a community is adequately served. It is important to note that many cities calculate large tracts of inaccessible conservation land and large lakes and reservoirs in their park land inventory. Each city is, in this regard, unique.

The chart below compares San Antonio with four Texas and 17 municipalities throughout the nation in the number of park acres that they own and/or manage apart

from other public providers. In some cases, city government is not the primary provider of local park lands. The data is the most recently available from the International City Managers Association (1995).

#### **Texas Cities**

<u>City</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Park Acres</u>	<u>Park Acres/1,000</u>
Austin	523,352	14,583	27.86
Dallas	1,006,877	21,642	21.49
Houston	1,738,443	20,420	11.75
Arlington	294,000	2,900	9.86
San Antonio	1,068,600	6,809	6.37

#### **United States Cities Outside Texas**

<u>City</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Park Acres</u>	<u>Park Acres/1,000</u>
Oklahoma City, OK	466,200	14,883	31.92
Phoenix, AZ	1,082,610	31,146	28.77
San Diego, CA	1,148,851	32,017	27.87
Cincinnati, OH	364,040	7,292	20.03
Kansas City, MO	445,802	8,426	18.90
Wichita, KS	304,011	3,652	12.01
Norfolk, VA	239,900	2,453	10.23
Riverside, CA	247,800	2,499	10.08
Richmond, VA	202,263	1,718	8.49
Sacramento, CA	394,000	2,424	6.15
Virginia Beach, VA	421,517	2,534	6.01
Reno, NV	156,697	679	4.33
Long Beach, CA	424,276	1,697	4.00
Tucson, AZ	440,334	1,357	3.08
Las Vegas, NV	374,239	1,150	3.07
Fresno, CA	376,130	1,140	3.03
Anaheim, CA	296,497	697	2.35

#### **Summary of average acres per 1,000 population** (for cities listed above)

Texas	15.47 acres
United States	11.78 acres
Texas & U.S. Cities	13.63 acres

\* Source: International City Managers Association, Comparative Performance Measurement Consortium, Parks and Recreation Services, Fiscal Year 1995\*

## NEED FOR PROGRAMS

While the comparison of population and park acreage serves as a guide to determining need for facilities, the need for programming is complicated by many factors. It is here that the profile of community residents including age, income and ethnicity plays a significant role. When these population statistics are combined with social statistics such as educational level, juvenile arrests, and births to young and/or single mothers, a profile emerges of needs that should be addressed as much as practicable through the parks and recreation system. Using this profile, existing and proposed facilities and programs can be studied to assure that they meet these community needs.

It is important to note that typical park system plans in this country have been centered solely on physical needs based on numerical standards. This has been true in San Antonio's previous park system plans, as well. The Parks and Recreation System Plan, however, is based on the premise that physical improvements, to include park acquisition and facilities' development, can only be planned and recommended if the programmatic needs of the community are identified first, thereby dictating the needed facilities.

Physical improvements are primarily funded through capital campaigns and general bond issues, whereas maintenance of those physical improvements and program development are primarily funded through annual operating budgets. This interrelationship of funding support is critical to the viability and sustainability of all facilities and their related programs.

Additionally, all programs offered, or to be offered, by the City of San Antonio do not require a typical community center or recreation facility to be successful. Programs such as the Roving Leader program are "mobile" and can be offered out of a variety of sites including City parks, private neighborhood centers, schools, and churches. The dependence on an anchored facility and its related operation and maintenance costs can be lessened with this approach.

The City is currently expanding the availability of historically perceived "inaccessible" facilities and programs, such as golf courses and tennis centers. Creating sustainable activities for low income and non-traditional users of such facilities, especially for youth who live near the facilities, will remain a high priority. Access to other traditionally non-urban activities such as hiking, boating, and fishing must also be pursued.